

THE FAILURE OF DAVID BERRY.

BY SARAH ORNE JEWETT.

MR. DAVID BERRY used to keep his shop in a small wooden building in his own yard, and worked steadily there a great many years, being employed by a large manufacturing company in Lynn at soling and heeling men's boots. There were just such small shoe shops as his scattered among the villages and along the country roads. Most of the farmers knew something of the shoemaking trade, and they and their sons worked in their warm little shops in winter when they had nothing else to do, and so added a good deal of ready money to their narrow incomes. The great Lynn teams, piled high with clean wooden shoe boxes, came and went along the highways at regular times to deliver and collect the work. Many of the women bound shoes, and sometimes in pleasant weather half a dozen friends came together with their bundles, and had a bit of friendly gossip as they stitched. The little shops were only large enough for the shoe benches, with shiny leather seats and trays of small tools, sprinkled with steel and wooden shoe pegs and snarled with waxed ends; for their whetstones and lapstones and lasts, and the rusty raging little stoves, with a broken chair or two, where idlers or customers could make themselves permanently comfortable. No woman's broom or duster had any right to invade the pungent, leathery, dusty, pasty abodes of shoemaking; these belonged to men, and had a rudeness akin to savagery, together with a delightful, definite sort of hospitality as warm as the atmosphere itself. If there were not a life-sustaining broken pane of glass somewhere, the door had to be left ajar. There were apt to be apples on the high window ledges, and any one might choose the best and eat it, and throw the core down among the chips of leather. The shoemaker usually had a dog, which wagged an impartial tail at each new-comer; for the shoemaker always sat in the same place, and society came and found him there, and told news and heard it, and went away again. There were some men who passed their time as guests in shoemakers' shops, especially in winter; their wives were fortunate in having other sources of income, and merely looked out

for their rights in the matter of neighborhood news. These shoemakers' guests were a distinct and recognized class. There never were many of them, and they each had a sufficient excuse for idleness, either in their diligent wives, or some slight physical hinderance to active labor.

One cannot follow a farmer as he ploughs his furrows in a clayey field and expect the time to be given to steady conversation, but a shoemaker sits all day pounding, pegging, and silently shaping leather with his thin sharp knife; sits at the receipt of custom and news. He likes to have his time beguiled with idle talk; he grows wise in many ways, and deeply reflective as he grows old. The humble hero of this brief tale, Mr. David Berry, was one of the pleasantest and wisest and least prejudiced of shoemakers. You could not spend five minutes' pegging time with him and miss hearing an ever-to-be-remembered piece of rural wisdom, some light coin of country speech, bearing the stamp of that mint where wit holds the hammer.

He was always an old-looking man for his years, and as wise of countenance as a Greek philosopher. In the days when parishioners listened critically to sermons, and on Mondays and Tuesdays argued excitedly for and against the minister's opinions, Mr. David Berry, though never a fierce partisan, could always keep the points and heads of the discourses very clear in his mind. He was much respected among the old residents of the town, and always made Judge Hutton's and General Barstow's best boots, and patiently repaired the foot-gear of half the men and women of his neighborhood. Everything prospered with him in early life; his wife was busy and cheerful, and helped him to earn, though nobody could help him to save. His steady business brought in enough—Lynn work and custom work together—to pay for their house and bit of land in course of time, but David Berry was one who liked to give for giving's sake; he believed with all his heart in foreign missions; he considered the poor, and was in every way a generous man. People did not notice this trait at first, because he never had large sums to give,

and one never looked for his cramped handwriting at the head of a subscription paper, but you always might find it before you came to the end.

Everything prospered until he and his wife were far past middle life, and then suddenly became aware that the growth of the town was leaving them at one side. The tide of business had swept away from the old shoe shop. Sometimes Mr. Berry did not have a customer all day, and his wife came out with her sewing and sat on the door-step to keep him company. The idlers had disappeared, some to another world, and the rest evidently had followed the track of business; they were off at the square looking at men who drove new horses by and tried to look unconscious; at mercantile strangers who came from Boston; at the great brick walls of the new mills which were going to bring so much money to the town. Professional idlers have no spirit of loyalty, they find occupation in the occupation of others, and they are fond of novelty.

Business had gone to another part of the town, and it was the plainest sort of good sense to follow it. One morning, after much trotting back and forward, an express wagon was backed up to the door of the little shoe shop in David Berry's yard, and loaded with the old shoe bench and the rusty stove, and all the sole-leather and old shoes and boots, and the idlers' chairs, and a great quantity of queer-shaped wooden lasts, and these were soon bestowed, looking meagre enough, in a narrow brick store down-town. The rent had been a great lion in the way to a man who had never paid any rent; but Mrs. Berry was sanguine, and had no sentimental ties to the old shop, which she had always complained of as a dirty place and a temptation to the loafers of that neighborhood. Before long she succeeded in getting a good offer for the empty little building from a neighbor who was enlarging his hen-house, and could not understand why her husband was slow to seize upon such a good handful of ready money, and even after he had taken it, would not stay at home and lend a hand at the moving. Mrs. Berry declared that the yard looked a great deal better without the old shoe shop. She could sit at her favorite window in the kitchen now, where the light was best, and look far down the street, as she never could before, to see the passing.

But David Berry felt old and bewildered in his new quarters. The light was not nearly so good, and his tools were scattered, and he had to get up and cross the room half a dozen times in an hour, when formerly he had only to reach to the shelf above his head or across to the cutting board. He put up some signs in his window, made for him long ago out of friendship by one of the idlers, whose only gift was one for ornamental penmanship. "Boots and Shoes Repaired While You Wait" was the most prominent of these, and brought the industrious little man a good many hurried ten cent jobs of pegging and heeling. Some of his old friends followed him; those who could afford to have their boots made still did so, for David Berry had won considerable renown for making comfortable shoes. But almost every one in the fast-growing extravagant little town thought it better to spend two dollars three times in the six months than five dollars once, and ready-made boots and shoes were coming more and more into favor. Still there was work enough to do, though life was not half so friendly and pleasant as it used to be; and it always seemed strange to the little round-shouldered old man to take his long walk down the street after breakfast, and put the new key into the lock of an unfamiliar door. Mrs. Berry thought that her husband had lacked exercise, and that his walk did him good. She promoted him to a higher station of respectability in her own mind because he had a store down-town, even though that store was a queer little three-cornered place tucked in at the head of the street between two large blocks.

There was only a north light in the new shop, and this seemed strange to a man who had been browned like a piece of the leather he worked upon because, small as the old shoe shop was, there were five windows in it, facing east and west and north, besides the upper half of the door, which was glazed, and faced to the southward. In dark weather, as the autumn came on, he had to light up early, and the care of the three lamps which were necessary for the new place of business seemed very troublesome. But he pegged and pounded away bravely. The old bench and the lapstone and all the tools were familiar, if the surroundings were not. He often said to himself that he should have felt like a king when he

was a young journeyman to have had such a good location and outlook for business as this. There was an opportunity, besides, for making new friends. An old sailor with a wooden leg came in one morning to have his one boot patched, and the two men instantly recognized a capacity for comfortable companionship in one another. David Berry had made one wretched fishing voyage to the banks before he finally settled upon his trade, and this made him a more intelligent listener to the life history of a mariner than was commonly to be found.

So the old sailor was unmolested in the best seat by the stove, by the time winter had set in. There was a poor little child, too, who came almost every day, and sat by the work-bench and watched the sharp knife and the round-headed hammer, the waxed ends and the lapstone, do their work. Mr. Berry had seen the little thing as he went to his work in the morning, and it being natural to him to inspect people's shoes before he glanced at their faces, he had been compassionate toward a worn-out sole, and offered his services at mending it. The child put her little hand into his, and they walked along together to the shop. She was a poor little body, and grateful for the luxurious warmth and for an apple, but the mended shoe she took quite as a matter of course. Ever since, she had come every day for a while—to sit beside the bench, to run errands, to love the kind old man and look at him eagerly—but into what crevice of the town she disappeared when she went out of the shop door, he never knew.

It came into Mr. David Berry's thoughts sometimes in the old shop how he had pegged away on his bench year after year, and how many men and women had kept him company for a time and then disappeared. There had been six ministers of the parish to which he and his wife belonged, and they had all gone away or died. It sometimes seemed as if he were going to peg away forever just the same, and the rest of the world change and change; but in these later days the world outside seemed to fare on its prosperous and unhindered way, while he was battling against change himself. But for all that, he liked many things in the new life. He was doing more business, if only the rent were not so high; and Mrs. Berry was completely satisfied with him, which was most delightful of all. She could not have treat-

ed him better if he had owned the whole new shoe factory that was just being fitted with its machinery and office furniture. Some misguided persons went so far as to suggest that David should apply for work there, but his wife was scornful in the extreme, and so, to tell the truth, was David himself. Since his days as apprentice, and a few months spent as a journeyman in seeing the shoemaking world, he had been his own man.

Some time went by, and business seemed just as good, and even the continuous stream of passers-by in the street made the old shoemaker feel as if he could not work fast enough to keep up with the times. There was no question among Mr. David Berry's friends about his unflagging prosperity. His friend the doctor, who said always and everywhere when he found opportunity that no shoemaker in town understood the anatomy of the human foot as Mr. Berry did, looked at him sharply once or twice, and asked if he had light enough, and if he had a good appetite nowadays, but there never was anything but an unaffectedly cheerful answer. The change had been good on the whole, and the rent was always paid on the day it was due, though Mrs. Berry forgot about it every quarter, and could not imagine what her man did with his money. Think of the work he had now! As much again as came to him in his shop in the yard. She asked him sometimes if he spent it for nuts and candy, remembering that in his early days he had yielded to such temptations, but David colored, and shook his head soberly. He did buy an apple or an orange for the little girl sometimes, but he could not confess it even to his wife. Mrs. Berry sometimes looked into the place of business, and once or twice had found the child there, and asked all sorts of questions, but the old man hastened to suggest another subject, saying that she did no mischief, and kept some others out of that chair who would be in it and bothering him if she were not. When the little clerk's mysterious grandmother kept her at home, Mr. Berry felt very lonely. She was an odd, silent child; but they felt the warmth of each other's affection without a word being said, and were contented in their opportunity of being together. Mr. Berry sometimes believed that if the grandmother should die, from whom this stray little person ran away daily as a matter of

course, he should try to persuade his wife to give the child a home. Before long Mrs. Berry would need some one to help in the house; but all this got no further than being a pleasant holiday flight of his imagination.

In the second year of Mr. David Berry's occupation of the down-town place of business he yielded to bad advice, and enlarged his business unguardedly. The man who had bought the old shoe shop came in one night to get a pair of new boots, and after beating the price down unmercifully, and robbing honest David of nearly all his small profits, under pretence of hard times, and being a neighbor, and past favors shown about buying the building, he sat down for a friendly talk, saying that it was almost time for closing up, and then they could walk home together. David was glad to have a companion in his evening's journey of three-quarters of a mile. He used to go home to dinner at first, but of late it seemed to keep him out of his shop just when the mill people were likely to wish to come in. The little girl was apt to come in at noon and share his feast.

"You've got more room than you want here," said the unprofitable customer, looking about with a lordly air. "Why don't you put in some new stock? Why don't you keep ready-made boots?"

"I can't recommend them to customers," said the shoemaker, frowning.

"You needn't recommend them; they'll be snapped up quick enough if you keep the prices low. Plenty of ways of getting round recommendations."

David Berry said nothing.

"And you are doing well as you are, so what you could sell extra would be clear gain, and draw in a sight o' folks who don't come in now. I hear they sell second-choice shoes at the factory for next to nothing. My woman gets hers that way. You see, the thread 'll break, or the needle, and make a scratch on the leather, or there'll be some little defect, and the shoe's just as good to wear, but 'twon't do to put in the shipping cases."

"I ain't goin' to palm off no such stuff on folks that respect either me or themselves," said Mr. David Berry, reddening.

"You can tell folks just what they be," urged the poultry merchant. "Some likes that kind the best. I can lend ye something to start on: just as soon lend ye as not."

The shoemaker rose and put by his tools and his apron, but made no answer. The little girl, who was lingering late, waited until he had put on his coat and hat and locked the door, then put her hand into his and trotted at his side. Sam Wescott was amused at the sight, but after they passed two or three squares, the child slipped away silently down the side street.

"I'd think the matter over about extending your business," he suggested again; and this time David Berry said, gravely, that he would think of it, and ask Mrs. Berry; then he spoke decidedly about other matters, but would hear no more of business until they parted.

He went in at the side door of his little house, and hung up his coat and hat in the narrow entryway before he opened the door of the kitchen. Mrs. Berry was putting some old-fashioned shoe lasts into the stove. She was all dressed in her best, and there was a look of festivity; it was evident that she had company to tea.

"Step into the bedroom quick as you can, David, an' put on a clean shirt and your best coat. Mis' Lester is here, an' her son's wife. They come over from West Farms in the stage, shopping, and I overpersuaded 'em to spend the night. I just run over and asked the Wescotts to come too. I've been wantin' to ask them this great while; you know, they're some connection o' the Lesters. I can't make this fire burn, no matter what I do. Them lasts is got too old-fashioned even to burn."

"There, hold! hold!" exclaimed David, rescuing a last from the very jaws of the devouring stove. "That last ain't to be burnt; it's a very particular one with me. I won't have ye take any o' those in the barrel."

"They're all one to me," said Mrs. Berry, laughing. "I wish barrel and all were out o' my way. Come, go and dress up, David, and have some ambition besides hoardin' them old lasts!" She was very busy, but she turned round to look at him. "You feel well, don't you?" she asked, anxiously, disturbed by an unexplainable change in his looks. "Now you're doin' so well, you might shut up shop for a week, and go off and have a good visit somewhere. I'd like a change," she pleaded. "There, David Berry, you don't know how glad I be to have you out o' that little sixpenny shoe shop. I feel so free to have company when I want it, and not to stop and count every cent.

I'm going to make some o' my best tea-cakes, the kind that takes six eggs."

David stood, with the last in his hand, looking at her and faintly smiling approval. He was childishly delighted when she was pleased with herself and him, as she appeared to be to-night. Then he turned and went into the bedroom, and found his clean shirt and satin stock and his Sunday coat spread out for him on the bed.

After tea was over, and the women had settled down to steady conversation, Sam Wescott returned to the subject of the extension of David Berry's capital, and David said that he had been thinking it over, and believed it would be no harm to try and work off a few dozen pairs of the factory shoes. He had put by something for a rainy day, though his rent hampered him all the time, and his wood bill had been double what he expected. There was no place to store firewood at the little shop, and he had bought a foot at a time at an increased price. Before the tea party broke up, he had borrowed fifty dollars from Sam Wescott. There was nothing said about the interest being put low because they were neighbors. David Berry felt uneasy about this departure from his rule of never borrowing money, but he didn't like to touch what they had in the bank. It was little enough, and yet his wife really wanted to feel better off, now that she was in her prime. For himself, he was older, and would be contented to do without tea parties and the tea-cakes that took six eggs. But for several days Mrs. Berry kept saying, "What makes you so dumb, David?" And David would look at her with his slow smile, and make no excuse for himself.

A year went slowly by in these plain lives, and brought no change except that Mrs. Berry had a long fit of sickness, and a woman had to be hired to take care of her, and the doctor's considerate bill was paid, and David Berry, that prudent, saving man, who had feared debt as if it were a tiger, found himself likely to be behind-hand with his rent, and obliged for the first time to tell the parish collector that he could not pay the quarter's pew rent or his punctual missionary subscription until next month. The situation was not so terrible, after all, as he might have expected. His wife was slowly recovering her strength, and he had plenty of work to do. The little three-cornered

shop was reopened, and he set himself to work again, and felt as prosperous as usual as soon as he felt the old hammer in his hand. The little girl was waiting about the door, though he had not been there for several weeks except for an hour or two at a time. He had forgotten his obligations to the business world in his cares of nursing and forlorn house-keeping: but now, as he assured the little clerk, for lack of a wiser confidante, he had found a good woman, who was glad to come and spend the rest of the winter. She looked at him wonderingly. It never occurred to him to persuade her into more confiding speech, because she always smiled at him when he looked up and smiled at her.

It is astonishing how one may feel secure in the presence of dreaded danger. David Berry became used to the surly calls of the rent agent and the wood and coal man, and to Sam Wescott's disagreeable references to the money that was still owed on account. David answered them all soberly that they must give him a little time. He had been in hard sledding lately, but he was picking up his trade fast. The ready-made shoe business had not been successful, and while he was at home, a leak in the roof had ruined the best of the stock, but he had managed to pay Sam Wescott all but sixteen dollars of the fifty. If it had not been his rule to pay the doctor's bill first after the minister's dues, he might have been ready with his rent. David Berry never was quick-handed: he was growing slower every year, and he took great pains with his stitches and patches. At ten and fifteen cents each for his minor pieces of work, it took a good while to earn a dollar. "Give me a little time," he always said; "I mean to pay ye; I've always paid my bills, and asked no favors of any man until now." He worked as fast as he could and as long as he could, and spring was coming on: with the long days he could do even better.

One day Sam Wescott, an impetuous, thoughtless sort of man, who liked to have his own way about things, and was rather fond of his petty grudges, met the rent collector of the property to which David Berry's place of business belonged.

"Can you get anything out of old Berry yet?" asked the rent collector.

"No, not yet; he keeps promising. I guess he'll pay, but I'm beginning to want

my money," said Wescott, pompously, as if he liked the reputation of having money out at interest.

"Tain't our rule to keep tenants who get behindhand," said the other. "He's getting along in years, and all that. It ain't a shop that's been called desirable heretofore, but there's an Italian fellow after it sharp that wants to keep fruit, and I've got to warn old Berry out, I guess, one o' these days."

Wescott ought to have been ashamed, but he really felt a lurking sense of satisfaction. The time had been when he had been in debt, not to say disgrace, which David Berry had taken occasion to justly comment upon, and the chance had now come to assist at David's own downfall. He might always have been steady at church, a good neighbor, and prompt of pay, and able to look every man in the face, but the welcome time had come to show him up as no better than other folks.

A few days afterward, the mischief having been set in motion, a blow fell out of a clear sky. The wood and coal man heard a whisper of other debts, and was quickly to the fore with his own account; and the shoe-factory book-keeper sent an insolent young fellow to demand instant pay for the last purchase of shoes, although it wanted two weeks to the regular time of payment. Sam Wescott felt sorry when he slouched into the little shop and saw his old neighbor's scared, hurt, grayish face. David Berry was keeping on with his work out of sheer force of habit. He did not know what his hands were doing; his honest heart grew duller and heavier every minute with pain.

"I was going to pay your bill to-morrow, sir," he said, appealingly, to the rent collector. "I thought that ought to come first. I've been hard up for ready money, but I've got within two dollars of it." He did not look at Sam Wescott.

"The rest of us has some rights," said the shoe-factory messenger, loudly.

A crowd was gathering about the door; the poor little girl—the little clerk—began to cry. There were angry voices; somebody had brought a law paper. In a few minutes it was all over, like dying. David Berry had failed, and they were putting up his shutters.

When he fairly comprehended the great blow, he stood up, swaying a little, just in front of the old shoe-bench. "It ain't fair, neighbors," he said, brokenly—"it

ain't fair! I had my rent 'most ready, and I don't owe Sam Wescott but sixteen dollars."

Then he burst into tears—pleasant old David Berry, with his gray head and stooping shoulders—and the little crowd ceased staring, and quickly disappeared, as if they felt a sense of shame.

"They say he owes everybody," one man told another, contemptuously.

David Berry took his old hat at last, and stepped out of the door. The agent locked it, and took the key himself and put it in his pocket.

"I'll send up your things this afternoon, sir; the law can't touch a man's tools, you know," he said, compassionately; but it was too late now for his compassion to do David Berry any good. The old man walked feebly away, holding the ragged little girl by her thin hand.

Sam Wescott did not like the tone with which all his neighbors commented upon the news of Mr. Berry's failure. He explained carefully to every one that he felt sorry, but of course he had to put in his little bill with the rest. The whole sum of the old shoemaker's indebtedness came to less than a hundred dollars.

All the neighbors and friends rallied to show their sympathy and good-will, but Mr. Berry did not have much to say. A look of patience under the blows of fate settled into his worn old face. He had his shoe-bench put into the kitchen, and then wrote his name and occupation on a piece of paper, and tacked it on the gate. He sent away the woman who took care of his wife, though the good soul begged to stay, and he worked on and on from earliest morning to latest night. Presently his wife was about again, nervous and fretful, and ready to tiresomely deplore their altered fortunes to every customer. After the first influx of business prompted by sympathy, they seemed to be nearly forgotten again, and the old skilled workman bent his pride so low as to beg for work at the shoe factory, only to be contemptuously refused, simply because he was old.

Within a few months the doctor, who had been as good to David Berry and his wife as a brother, met Sam Wescott going down the street, and with a set look in his kind face stopped his horse, and beckoned to the poultry merchant.

Sam stepped out to the road-side.

"I've just come from David Berry's,"

the doctor said; "and the good old man is going to die."

"What do you mean?" asked Sam, staring indignantly.

"He's going to die," repeated the doctor. "And I make no accusation, because I would rather believe you were thoughtless than malicious in shutting him up. But you might have fended off his troubles by a single word; you might have said you'd stand security for his rent. It broke his honest heart. You've seen yourself how he's grown twenty years older. You took away his pride, and you took away his living, and now he's got a touch of pneumonia, and is going as fast as he can go. I can't do anything for him; his vitality is all spent."

The doctor shook his reins and drove on, and Wescott went back to the sidewalk, very angry and somewhat dismayed. Nobody knew what made him so cross at home, especially the day that David Berry died. The day of the funeral he pushed a tearful little girl away from the gate, who stood there wistfully looking in. He muttered something about children being underfoot and staring at such times, and did not know that she was the silent little clerk, who had a perfect right to count herself among the mourners. She watched everybody go into the house and come out, and when the humble procession started, she walked after it along the sidewalk, all the way to the burying-ground, as a faithful little dog might have done.

The next week somebody hung out a small red flag, and the neighbors gathered again to the auction. Mrs. Berry was broken in health, and every one said that it was best for her to sell the house, keeping some furniture for one room, and go up country to live with a cousin. Everything else was sold—the best room furni-

ture (of which the good people had been so proud), the barrel of lasts, the lapstone and round hammer, the old shoe-bench itself. David Berry was always slow and behind the times, many people said; he had been a good workman in his day, but he ran into debt and failed, and then died; and his wife had broken up, and gone to live up country. Hardly any one remembered to say that he paid all his debts before he died, with interest, if there were any; the world could think of him only as a man that had failed in business.

Everybody missed him and his honest work unexpectedly—the people who had been his near neighbors and received many kindnesses at his hands, with whom he had watched at night through their sicknesses and always been friendly with by day. Even strangers missed his kind face.

One day Sam Wescott was standing in the old shoe shop, which made a little shed outside his poultry-yard, and he happened to notice a bit of printed paper pasted to the wall, low down, where it must have been close to the old shoe-bench. He stooped to read it, out of curiosity, and found that it was only a verse out of the Bible: *Owe no man anything, but to love one another.*

Sam Wescott looked at it again, then he walked away down the path with his hands behind him. In a minute or two he came back, took his jack-knife out of his pocket, and scratched the verse from the wall. Somehow there was no getting rid of one's thoughts about the old man. He had laughed once, and told somebody that David Berry could travel all day in a peck measure; but now it seemed as if David Berry marched down upon him from the skies with a great army of those who owed no man anything but love, and had paid their debt.

BROTHERS.

BY GEORGE HORTON.

SPIDER,

At my window spinning,
Weaving circles wider, wider,
From the deft beginning,

Running
Wheels and spokes until you
Build your silken death-trap cunning,
Shall I catch you, kill you?